

УДК 2-264

“Religious Fantasy” as Element of Contemporary Religious Mythology

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Received 7.07.2011, received in revised form 7.10.2011, accepted 15.11.2011

In this article we define the notion “religious mythology”. Nowadays there is necessity to introduce this notion into the field of Religion Studies, as it better explains the interconnections between myth and religion. We also give basic definitions of such terms as myth, religion, religious mythology components. In contemporary youth subculture Religious fantasy is described as an element of religious mythology. In the article we define this phenomenon, specify peculiarities of religious fantasy associated with contemporary mass culture.

Keywords: myth, religion, religious mythology, fairytale, belief, youth subculture.

Introduction. Contemporary myth-making creates new, up-to-date mythologems, which are caused by phenomena of mass culture and based on the old, archaic mythologems. These are political mythology, mythology used in advertising, mythology of gender. Due to development of information technologies particular interest is raised as cybernetic (information) mythology emerges. Unlike ancient people modern men do not use mythological vision of the world; however in the course of contemporary social routine focus on the mythology becomes especially required. Myth-creation contributes to the liberation of modern man from his fears, from chaos, it realizes his striving for perfection, his utopian hopes; myth simplicity and schematism provide for clarity, predictability and psychological comfort.

Our intention is to analyze such a notion as “religious mythology” and one of its components – “religious fantasy.”

Sources and Methods. “Religious mythology” is a new notion, required in contemporary Religion Studies, Cultural Studies, philosophy of religion and other sciences which deal with interconnection between myth and religion. The methodological difficulty of determining the significant components of this notion is caused by a wide variety of approaches to both myth and religion and models of their interconnection. Let us specify basic notions. Mythology is one of the first universal philosophical systems in the history of humanity, which deals with almost all matters that people face. In this case myth acts as a consequence of the global identification of a person with nature, society, culture, God, so

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it is a kind of self-identification of an individual with all hypostases of universe. Thus, in human activity the myth serves as a universal significant complex that reveals the meaning of human life. Besides, myth is a way of expressing hidden supersensual realities through some emotionally significant for a person systems, which possess routine empirical visualization. Myth was created in a certain period of human history and it coexists with the humanity for the whole period of its culture development and it does not lose its significance, but it gives it new philosophical sense and meaning, it does not become "outdated", but it really exists and functions within human consciousness in its various fields including religion. As we have already said, there are many definitions of religion, but as the initial methodological definition of religion we assume the definition given by D.V. Pivovarov: "Religion is search and establishment of sacred bonds that provide an individual and (or) social groups with required integrity" (Pivovarov, 1998, p.738) "religion is human bond with the Absolute experienced on a personal level" (Pivovarov, 2011, p.199). The peculiarity of religion is revealed through the sacralization system. The main elements of this system are as follows. 1. Complex of the sacred ideas for particular society (ideology). 2. Psychological methods and means of persuading people of the unconditional truth of these ideas. 3. Specific significant forms of shrine embodiment, sacramental and hostile symbols. 4. Special organization. 5. Special actions, rituals, ceremonies (the cult) (Pivovarov, 2011-A, p.63). Creation of such system takes a lot of time, it absorbs past and present traditions. Thanks to the sacred traditions and real existing system of sacralization the society achieves the existence of a particular religion on all its horizontal (social groups, classes, nations) and vertical (generations) levels. When the selected object is sacralized, one believes in its reality stronger than in empirically

obvious things. This object obtains "a mythical halo", which provides for further promotion of its sacred meaning in human mind and behavior. The system of sacralization is filled with mythological narration, as religion requires explanation why it is necessary to perform this or that ritual and identify oneself with a religious character. Thus, under the term "religious myth" as something strictly structured, but full of vivid emotional content we mean the emotionally-filled text, narration explaining the important provisions of religious cult. Knowledge of this text helps to specify the behavior during the ritual, claims to be esoteric (i.e. belonging to a certain sacred group), explains some strange events and allows to identify oneself with the model (Prophet, God) as much as it is possible.

After giving definitions to the initial notions, we shall consider the models of interconnection between myth and religion. It is possible to specify four basic models of the interconnection between myth and religion. The first two can be called "genetic models", the third and the fourth – "models of interaction".

The first one runs that mythological consciousness historically precedes the religious one. There was a period in history when there were no religious beliefs, but myths had already existed. This is proved by such researchers as S.A. Tokarev, B.A. Rybakov, Carl Jung (in Psychology). The majority of researchers of ritualistic line of research accept this model in the study of myths.

The second model suggests that religion is a primary element of human being (the famous concept of pre-monotheism proposed by Christian scholars), and mythological subjects are something secondary as compared with religion. In modern literature A. Men supports these views in his works.

The third model states that religion and mythology exist in society together and perform identical functions but in different ways. These

ideas can be found in researches by B. Malinovsky, L. Levy-Bruhl, and M. Eliade.

The fourth model is represented in the works by J. Fraser, who distinguishes between myth and religion and examines them separately. That is, the mythological thinking has its own laws, and so does the religious thinking, and there is a connection between them.

Summing up all abovementioned, we come to conclusion that the religion is a kind of ideological framework stated in sacred texts (different in every religion), and the myth is its emotional content. Religion prescribes, sets the ideals of conduct and the myth explains emotionally and visually why it should be done. So, it is quite logical that there is such a category as "religious mythology" that would connect two interrelated phenomena of spiritual culture into something whole, and it is necessary to identify some of the elements of its ontological content.

Results. In our opinion, to the elements of religious mythology the following can be referred: eschatological myths manifesting themselves today in neocults; neopagan symbols of some new religious movements; fantasy variants that manifest themselves in role games through the images of the "magician", "sacrificer", "enchantress", "witch", "warrior," etc. There may be other elements of content of "religious mythology" notion, but in this article we examine only the abovementioned elements.

The main characteristics of religious myth are the following:

1. Religious myth allows to simplify the reality and to reduce its contradictions to a simple formula of struggle between Good and Evil. For example, the religious myth about witches in medieval times which was recorded in "The Hammer of Witches" by Spengler and Institoris. All the evil of the world is caused by women called witches, in order to destroy this evil, you just need to find the holders of evil and kill them.

2. In the religious myth the world is clear and completely known, so it makes one acquire a sense of harmony with the world. In primitive societies the myth was needed to protect the human mind from reality that seems cruel to the majority of people. That's why any information was encoded by means of sacred symbols, so that it could not harm human consciousness that was unable to evaluate the reality soberly. More clever people protected less clever ones from knowledge dangerous for them, giving them something safe and unable to take life from them. Religious myth helps people get rid from their fears of reality and focuses them not on present but on future improvement. Herewith improvement occurs either through ritual returning to fundamental principles (Eliade) or ritual actions of preparation for the future (new neocults). But the myth taken from archaic cultural variants focuses on the present. It is a peculiarity of the modern religious myth.

3. The third characteristic is connected with the second one and it lies in ritual actions. For example, E. Cassirer claims that the world of myth is dramatic: it is the world of actions, efforts, competing forces. Myth is not a system of dogmatic beliefs: it consists not only of images and ideas, but to a much greater degree of action. The vital principle of myth can only be described in terms of action. However, the actions of man who lives in the religious mythology are strictly limited by the prophets and the sacred texts of the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon at Benares, etc. If a person breaks these limits he is usually referred as "heretic," "stranger," "misbeliever", "sinner", and he shall be removed from this social group. This binary opposition "ours – not ours", "friends – enemies" is one of the most important religious mythologems.

4. The religious myth is irrational. As we have already underlined it is closely connected with human emotions and feelings. Without

emotions one cannot feel sympathy towards a religious leader and identify himself with him. Therefore, the religious myth has its own drama; it is fascinating, dynamic, and figurative. As a rule, it is based on fear, uncertainty, and only a religious hero can help get rid of such things.

Faith is emotional characteristic of a religious myth and it has a variety of subjects. "Subjects of faith may be either some material objects or inner world," D.V. Pivovarov states (Pivovarov, 2011-b p.395). As we study "religious fantasy" and it is only one element of religious mythology, we would like to point out that material objects are a subject of faith in it. Herewith the peculiarity of faith in religious fantasy can be characterized by the words of C.S. Lewis: "the art of holding on to things your reason has accepted, in spite of your changing moods... one must train the habit of Faith" (*The Chronicles of Narnia*, 2011, p.372).

"Removal of magic qualities" from the world, rationalization, scientific progress explain to a man those things which were previously explained by mythical consciousness; echoes and archetypes of myth continue existing in mass consciousness, taking from time to time forms of illusions, outer, mythical devoutness, what we can see in our century. However, man is very much inclined to believe in miracles, in fairytale, so there comes another aspect of religious mythology and that is a genre of "fantasy".

This is a genre of fantastic literature, which appeared in the beginning of the XX century and is based on the usage of mythological and fairytale subjects. Fantasy books often resemble historical adventure novels, in which action takes place in the imaginary world that is almost similar to the real one, but it is filled with supernatural phenomena and creatures. These worlds have its own physical laws, they have their own history, and they are inhabited by imaginary or borrowed from mythology creatures. Fantasy has its own genre characteristics: 1) the world

is unreal with the features that are impossible in our reality, 2) magic and folk characters are a necessary element, 3) adventurous plot (as a rule – connected with search, travel, war, etc.), 4) medieval surroundings, although there might be some options here, 5) hidden opposition between technology and magic and magic usually wins, 6) the main things are characters, their actions and emotions, magic and fairytale play a supporting, but not secondary role. 7) the plot is based on the confrontation between good and evil. The conflict between good and evil is often shown as a conflict between different types of good or disagreement with the methods of achieving good. 8) Like a fairytale, fantasy is structured ethically. However, fantasy differs from a fairytale. Good and evil in fantasy are equal, and in a fairytale good wins without suffering any losses. 9) The presence of the other world and its manifestations, 10) complete freedom of the author: he can turn the plot in the most unexpected way, as magical world of fantasy implies that everything is possible in it. This last feature is one of the most important and determining ones. It clearly shows the difference between fantasy and science fiction, because science fiction describes something probable and the author is constrained by certain limits. He has to give an explanation of all incredible things, explain them scientifically or pseudoscientifically (which often happens).

There are following types of fantasy: heroic, epic, "dark", playing, historical, humorous, feminist, child. As part of our research we would like to single out "religious fantasy" as a component of religious mythology. "The Chronicles of Narnia" by C.S. Lewis and "The Lord of the Rings" by J.R.R. Tolkien are classical examples of such kind. The overall aim of creating such fantasy worlds is to create with the use of Christian symbols a new world, understandable to a child, and to a non-believer or seeker regardless of their age. Among the issues raised in "The

"Chronicles of Narnia" there are also philosophical questions: how can we distinguish between the truth and illusion? Who is right? The character that is stronger or there are indisputable moral rules, which impose the same obligations on all of us? Is it possible, like it happened to the character of "Chronicles", to turn into a dragon and at the same time remain oneself? The problem of evil, the nature and primary source of morality, the existence of God, the reliability of miracles, the shortcomings of scientific materialism are the problems which are discussed in the pages of the novels by D.R.R.Tolkien and C.S. Lewis.

But created by these authors fantasy worlds exist regardless of the creators' wishes as they are publicized by mass media, making up the ontological field of lots of youth subcultures.

What are their characteristics? First, the attractiveness of the main characters (hero mythologem works here) and possibility to imitate them. In mass culture imitation becomes the key mechanism of influencing a person. That is why very often you can hear from teenagers, young people (and not only from them) that they are descended from "elves", "gnomes", "orcs", etc. Also, the plot of fantasy is usually based on the rivalry between warriors, but the key conflict is the confrontation between a warrior and a magician possessing superhuman abilities. Warrior is a superman of "body" as the result of physical development achieved due to the perceiving of images of the "perfect body" publicized by mass culture. "Magician" is a superman of spirit, the result of intellectual development achieved through mastering knowledge. These images unite into the kind of faith about which we spoke quoting Lewis's statement of faith.

Imitating and living by a given social roles-images, a man imitates patterns of perception and behavior peculiar to these images. The main thing in the imitating is appearance, the brightness of the image, but along with this one

forgets the depth of the image, its inner meaning. Behind the façade of the plot (which is especially true about the screen adaptation of the works of J.R.R.Tolkien and C.S. Lewis) we lose the main content – interest in the ideas of Christianity. But after watching the film, spoiled viewer is unlikely to turn into the reader, and he will take only a bright cover of a superhero.

Secondly, we'd like to recall the words of E.Cassirer that the myth is a personified desire of the group. In the imitation of the Hero a temporary access to the new space is created, it is designed by analogy with the space of fantasy. This space has a game character, there appears role-playing as a process in which players play certain situations constructed by analogy with the world of fantasy. The game excludes "subject-subject" distance between the player and a character, they merge into a single image. And here we can see an inversion. The player, initially running away from this world, through participation in role-playing game gains faith in ability to overcome "all borders", what in future contributes to rejection of escapism and gaining confidence in the reality. In addition, during the fantasy role-playing game there occurs a short-term connection between the personality of the player and the personality of the game character, whose image the player imitates. The result of this imitation is player's acquisition of the knowledge which belong to the perceived character (partial genius, courage, knowledge of magical powers, control over them, etc.) and temporary feeling of possessing fantasy hero super abilities. Bright-wrapping of a superhero-superman becomes more attractive than a long, difficult, sometimes tragic, work on the internal abilities of the soul which is invisible at times.

J.R.R.Tolkien saw a deep ethical and philosophical meaning in the phenomenon of escapism: "It is part of the essential malady of such days – producing the desire to escape, not indeed

from life, but from our present time and self-made misery – that we are acutely conscious both of the ugliness of our works, and of their evil... the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death" (J.R.R. Tolkien, 1994, p.36). Satisfaction of this desire, even in imagination, is one of the ways of acquiring peace of mind. After all, good always wins, as in a fairytale and in the world of fantasy. Therefore, a fantasy world, in some cases becomes a substitute for reality.

In his letters C.S. Lewis writes that, according to Tolkien, fairytale charm lies in the fact that in it the person fully realizes himself as a creator. He does not "comment on life", as they say today, he creates a "secondary world". According to Tolkien, as it is one of the functions of man, then its successful implementation always brings joy. Thus fiction becomes some special reality, a parallel world having the attractiveness of a fairytale and almost earth materiality that makes one want to become familiar with it, learn it better, perhaps, to participate in co-creation of the world, objectification of it. As, for example, the specific features of form and content of Tolkien's trilogy "Lord of the Rings" made possible its transformation from a simple

work of literature into the source of formation of a subculture.

Conclusion. Thus, we can come to the following conclusions. From our point of view, "religious fantasy" is an element of the concept of "religious mythology". This concept can be applied to the characteristic of subcultures (mostly youth one) as a special area of mythmaking, born by the modern mass media. Tolkienism is a very multidimensional and non-uniform phenomenon. It can be considered dangerous only when a child, a teenager is too keen on the fantastic part of the novel. If a teenager goes to meetings of like-minded fellows, participates in role-playing games, parents are obliged to get interested in the content of these games. In conclusion we would like to say that such an alternative as the orthodox fantasy does not exist yet. But hopefully it's just a matter of time. By this time for the genre of orthodox fantasy we may set up the works of orthodox writer Yulia Voznesenskaya "Cassandra's Path" and "My Afterlife Adventures". It seems that in future there is a possible alternative for young people in choosing the subject to follow, as far as fantasy characters and role-playing are so much popular.

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«Религиозное фэнтези» как элемент современной религиозной мифологии

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В данной работе определяется содержание понятия «религиозная мифология». Необходимость введения данного понятия в область религиоведения актуальна, т.к. четче проясняет сферы взаимодействия мифа и религии. Дается исходное определение мифа, религии, структурных составляющих религиозной мифологии. Одним из элементов религиозной мифологии в современной молодежной субкультуре выступает религиозное фэнтези. В статье автор дает характеристики этому явлению, указывает на характерные особенности религиозного фэнтези, связанные с современной массовой культурой

Ключевые слова: миф, религия, религиозная мифология, сказка, вера, молодежная субкультура.
